

CAR CARE PRODUCT MANUFACTURER “CLEANS-UP” INTERNATIONALLY

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With the help of the Commerce Department's U.S. Commercial Service, Allbrite Car Care Products has begun to take advantage of the opportunities that international markets offer small U.S. businesses.

Located in Anaheim, California, Allbrite manufactures a complete line of cleaning and detailing products, serving the automobile detailing industry through a network of distributors. Allbrite has been in existence since 1965 and was bought by present owner J.J. Jhaveri in 1993. Prior to 1993, Jhaveri ran SupraChemical, which specialized in car wash products. When Allbrite came up for sale, Jhaveri saw the obvious synergy that could exist between SupraChemical and Allbrite, specifically in regards to products, client base and distribution. After buying Allbrite, Jhaveri merged SupraChemical and Allbrite under the Allbrite brand.

As a means to broaden Allbrite's customer base, diversify revenue and foster

growth, Jhaveri began to consider exporting. Though he was happy with the success the firm was having in California, Jhaveri felt that the opportunities of international business were too great to pass up. Jhaveri also believed that because Allbrite was successful in California, the world's car capital, the company could succeed anywhere. In short, Jhaveri and Allbrite had already been baptized by fire.

However, confidence alone was not enough to take Allbrite into the global marketplace. Jhaveri knew he needed further export knowledge if he wanted his firm to be successful over the long-term in international business. Jhaveri came upon the ultimate source of practical exporting advice in a Los Angeles Times article. The article described a step-by-step export-training program, made available through the U.S. Commercial Service's Global Diversity Initiative (GDI).

The U.S. Commercial Service is a division of the U.S. Department of Commerce and promotes the export of U.S. goods and services, particularly by small and medium-size businesses. The Commercial Service has a network

of more than 80 international offices and 100 offices across the U.S. The GDI program targeted minority led U.S. businesses and worked to provide them with the knowledge to expand their businesses abroad. Jhaveri approached the U.S. Commercial Service through its Los Angeles U.S. Export Assistance Center.

Kristin Houston, a Commercial Service trade specialist based in California, led the GDI program. During the export training, Jhaveri worked with trade specialists and partner organizations such as the Small Business Administration to better understand federal government resources available to U.S. businesses, export processes and financing and the power of a comprehensive and targeted marketing campaign. By the end of the training Jhaveri felt that Allbrite could enter the global marketplace as a learned firm rather than one that only "knew a little bit from here or there."

After their initial work with Allbrite, U.S. Commercial Service trade specialists recommended that the firm first enter Canada. In all, Canada is the United States' largest export market,

having imported \$1.79 trillion of U.S. products in 2000. To understand the dominance of U.S. businesses in this market, that is approximately 67 percent of Canada's total imports. In 2000, California alone exported \$15.2 billion in products and services to Canada.

Jhaveri agreed that Canada held much promise. Yet, Jhaveri felt that Allbrite's marketing materials should be reworked so the firm was presented as best as possible in the sophisticated Canadian market. While Jhaveri

Like Canada, Mexico's geographic proximity and open markets, a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), make it an ideal destination for new exporters like Allbrite. As of 2000 the United States accounted for approximately 74 percent of Mexico's total imports. Mexico trails only Canada in dollar value of U.S. goods and services imported, totaling \$1.1 trillion in 2000. California businesses alone exported \$14.4 billion in goods and services to Mexico in 2000. With the continued

Assistance Center nearby they should tap its resources. The value-added training that U.S. Commercial Service specialists can provide will help firms understand the numerous facets of exporting and give them the tools to enter new markets. Additionally, says Jhaveri, U.S. businesses just need to be confident, understanding that international business does hold great opportunity. If businesses have the perseverance and foresight to succeed in the competitive U.S. market, they are sure to be successful abroad. Luckily,

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reworked Allbrite's marketing materials, U.S. Commercial Service specialists in Toronto investigated further the opportunities that the Canadian market held for Allbrite. Along with studying the Canadian market, trade specialists also began to build a base of potential clients. In short, the U.S. Commercial Service was working to ensure that when Jhaveri was ready, Allbrite could hit the ground running at full speed.

By the time Jhaveri unleashed the improved marketing materials on the Canadian market, trade specialist Cheryl Schell of the U.S. Commercial Service Toronto had identified a pool of qualified potential clients. When Schell received Allbrite's new materials, she promptly released them to potential distributors. The new marketing materials and the U.S. Commercial Service's matchmaking abilities promptly yielded results, garnering Allbrite \$180,000 in their first international sale.

Excited over this early success Jhaveri plans to first enter Mexico's market and eventually expand to South America.

development of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, there is little doubt that Allbrite's success can spread southward like wildfire.

Jhaveri says his market entry strategies will continue to involve the U.S. Commercial Service; he is considering using the agency's Gold Key Service to drive Allbrite's continued expansion. The Gold Key is a matchmaking service in which trade specialists arrange one-on-one appointments with carefully selected potential partners in targeted markets. To build his knowledge of Mexico Jhaveri has maintained close contact with U.S. Commercial Service trade specialists. These specialists have provided the new exporter with market briefings and organized meetings with visiting commercial specialists from U.S. Commercial Service offices in Mexico. To further supplement his expanding export knowledge, Jhaveri has also attended meetings with trade specialists from Singapore, Australia and China.

Asked to provide advice to other firms looking to export, Jhaveri promptly said that if there is a local U.S. Export

the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Commercial Service have the resources and contacts readily available to make this opportunity seem less like a distant mirage, but a tangible and attainable goal. The first step for small businesses is just to decide that the time to export is now. ■